DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 531 CS 510 445

AUTHOR Banks, Tracy V.
TITLE Why They Do What They Say They Do: A Closer Look at African-American and European-American Communication Styles.
PUB DATE 2000-11-00
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (86th, Seattle, WA, November 9-12, 2000).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Black Students; College Students; Communication Research; Comparative Analysis; Constructivism (Learning); Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; *Interpersonal Communication; Research Methodology; White Students
IDENTIFIERS African Americans; *Communication Styles; *Compliance Gaining Strategies; European Americans; Person Centered Approach

ABSTRACT

An earlier study compared the communication styles of African Americans and European Americans (Banks, 2000). Its purpose was to contribute to that body of literature by addressing some of the limitations of the extant research (e.g., by controlling for variables and by grounding the research in the framework of a theoretical perspective). The study focused specifically on the messages participants provided as the basis for their responses to the scenarios. This current study summarizes the results of that analysis and examines larger implications of the findings. Participants, 63 African-American and 60 European-American college students, responded to 6 scenarios. The rationales underlying the decision to employ a given strategy were of primary importance in this aspect of the study. Participants were asked to report their reasons for using a given strategy and their goals in each situation; rationales and goals were evaluated jointly. This issue was explored further during one-on-one interviews with 20 of the students. Consistent with the first (earlier) part of the study, this aspect of the study illustrated the need to consider a number of variables when developing communication theories and models to avoid oversimplifying the relationship between culture and communication. The rationales and the interview data reveal that numerous factors lead to similarities and differences in communication across cultures. Contains 2 tables of data and 20 references. Appended are "scenarios," coding indices for rationales, and interview questions. (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 447 531

Running head: WHAT THEY SAY THEY DO

Why They Do What They Say They Do:

A Closer Look at African-American and European-American Communication Styles

Tracy V. Banks

Department of Communications

Alabama State University

Key Words: African-American communication styles, European-American communication styles, constructivist theory, methodological issues, person-centered communication, compliance-gaining behavior, request refusals, comforting communication

Tracy V. Banks is an associate professor in the Department of Communications at Alabama State University. She can be reached via e-mail at vernetta@gateway.net. Tracy Banks' mailing address is P.O. Box 240374, Montgomery, AL 36124.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

T. V. Banks

CS 510 435

Why They Do What They Say They Do:

A Closer Look at African-American and European-American Communication Styles

The study discussed in this paper compared the communication styles of African-Americans and European-Americans. Numerous studies exist that provide support for a "differences hypothesis" (e.g., Cheek, 1976; Kochman, 1981, 1990, 1994; Labov, 1987), but all studies do not support the assumption that there are striking differences in the communication styles of African-Americans and European-Americans. A number of studies actually contradict the "differences hypothesis" because they either provide direct or indirect evidence that suggests that the difference in the communication styles of African-Americans and European-Americans are not as pronounced as some research indicates (e.g., Butters, 1989; Collier, 1991; Garner, 1994; Goodwin, 1990; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1981). The inconsistencies in the literature have prompted some researchers to question the exact nature of the differences that have been reported. Critics believe some of the differences observed may reflect the failure to control for variables such as social class, age, gender context, and geographic location (e.g., Bailey, 1987; Garner & Rubin, 1986; Goodwin, 1990; Ting-Toomey, 1986; Vaughn-Cook, 1987; Wolfram, 1981).

In another paper, I discussed the results of a study that compared the communication styles of African-Americans and European Americans (Banks, 2000). The purpose of the study was to contribute to that body of literature by addressing some of the limitations of the extant research (e.g., by controlling for variables such as age, social class, and context, and by grounding the research in the framework of a theoretical perspective). Specifically, the study, which was grounded in constructivist theory

(Applegate, 1978; Applegate & Delia, 1980; Applegate & Sypher, 1988; Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1982), explored the person-centered quality of messages African-American and European-American college students provided in response to several hypothetical scenarios. In keeping with the constructivist tradition, the messages were coded using hierarchical indices that index increasing attempts to adapt to a listener's needs, feelings, intentions, and motives. The data were then analyzed using the ANOVA and paired t-test procedures.

The study revealed that the person-centered quality of the messages did not vary with ethnicity, but there were variations in the messages that corresponded with specific characteristics of the organizational and functional contexts embedded in the scenarios. I concluded that these findings were significant because they suggested that conclusions drawn to date about differences in the communication styles of African-Americans and European-Americans may be oversimplified.

The aspect of the study discussed in the earlier paper focused specifically on the messages participants provided in response to the hypothetical scenarios. Participants also provided the reasons that served as the basis for their responses to the scenarios. Additionally, some respondents participated in in-depth interviews and provided additional information about their responses. A subsequent analysis of the rationales the participants provided and the interview data produced some equally interesting results. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the results of that analysis and to discuss the larger implications of the findings.

Method

Participants

Sixty-three African-American and 66 European-American college students participated in this study. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 25. The mean age was 20.4 for African-Americans and 20.3 for European-Americans. The majority of the students reported they had some work experience (95% of the African-American students and 98% of the European-American students).

Procedures

Each participant responded to six scenarios. Multiple functional and organizational and functional contexts were embedded in the scenarios. Two scenarios instructed the respondent to convince another individual to do his or her share of a group project. Two scenarios instructed the respondent to refuse a request made by another. Two scenarios instructed the respondent to help another person cope with a stressful situation. A business setting served as the backdrop for three of the scenarios and an academic setting served as the backdrop for three other scenarios.

The rationales underlying the decision to employ a given strategy were of primary interest in this aspect of the study. Participants were asked to report their reason(s) for using a given strategy and their goal(s) in each situation. The rationales and the goal statements were evaluated jointly. This issue was explored further during one-on-one interviews with twenty of the participants.

Rationale Indices

Three coding systems (one for each functional scenario type) were used to evaluate the rationales and goal statements. The coding indices were grounded in the same theoretical perspective as the indices used to analyze the messages. Specifically, a coding system for analyzing regulative rationales developed by Applegate (1978) served as the foundation for the present analysis. The coding system for evaluating regulative rationales was modified and used to evaluate the rationales provided in response to the comforting and request refusal scenarios because similar coding systems do not exist.

Rationales provided by 20 participants (10 African-Americans and 10 European-Americans) were randomly selected and coded independently by two coders (an African-American female and a European-American male). When rating each item, coders were blind to participants' scores on the other items. Interrater reliability between the two coders was assessed by intraclass correlation. The rationales were coded independently by two coders. Reliabilities for the rationales described in the academic setting ranged from .79 to .83. Reliabilities for the rationales described in the business setting ranged from .85 to .89.

Interviews

Twenty respondents (10 African-Americans and 10 European-Americans) participated in the follow-up interviews. Five objectives guided the interviews. One objective was to examine whether the respondents recognized the similarities and differences between the scenarios. A second objective was to explore the similarities and differences in the perceived appropriateness of the responses in detail. A third objective was to explore whether participants felt they would react differently in similar situations.

A fourth objective was to examine the perceived realism of the scenarios. A fifth objective was to elicit information pertaining to any difficulty participants experienced in formulating responses to the scenarios as well as other reactions to the scenarios. Cultural differences in perceptions along these dimensions could influence how the participants responded and potentially bias the results.

Results

Rationales

The indices used to code the rationales are ordered hierarchically and index progressively higher levels of sensitivity to the individual and the rationales ranged from a low of one (least person-centered) to a high of three (most person-centered). The actual coding indices and examples of the rationales representing each level appear in Appendix B.

Although other research in the constructivist tradition has generated a wider range of responses than was evident in this data set, a three-level coding system most accurately captured the differences in the person-centered quality of these rationales. It is possible the range of responses that emerged in this study was narrower because of perceptions of appropriate communication associated with the institutional contexts embedded in the scenarios. Such a finding would be consistent with Knapp and Vangelisti's (1992) observation that the prescribed range of responses may be narrower depending on characteristics of the institutional setting.

The first level of each coding index reflected rationales that focused on normative assumptions about what constitutes appropriate behavior. The rationales coded at this level were the least adaptive to the listener's feelings, needs, intentions, and motives.

These rationales were governed by role prescriptions, including organizational constraints. Compliance-gaining rationales, request refusal rationales, and comforting rationales coded at this level cited rules and normative statements relevant to the situation and reflect the respondent's evaluation of the situation.

The second level of each index reflected rationales that indicated some effort to adapt to the listener's feelings. Rationales at the second level implicitly recognized the listener's perspective. Compliance-gaining and request refusal rationales coded at this level were primarily governed by a desire to adapt to the listener's feelings, but not the listener's needs. The rationales were based on assumptions of shared understanding about roles, norms, and rules about appropriate behavior. Comforting rationales coded at this level reflected attempts to improve the listener's distressed emotional state by diverting his or her attention away from the issue and the feelings present in the situation.

Rationales coded at the third level were governed by a desire to adapt to the listener's needs, motives, and intentions. Compliance-gaining rationales and request refusal rationales coded at this level were primarily governed by a desire to help the listener. Comforting rationales coded at this level were governed by a desire to improve the listener's distressed state by providing a positive outlook on the situation that is adapted to the listener's needs.

The rationales provided additional support for the conclusion that responses to the scenarios described in the business setting were the result of different reasoning processes driven by the nature of the organizational context in which those scenarios were described. Based on the content of the rationales, it is clear that people held expectations

about what constitutes appropriate behavior in a business setting. Examples of rationales that demonstrate this point include the following:

> I used this approach because this is a business and things should be handled in a business/timely fashion. The goal was to get the work done.
>
> This was a little more serious than the classroom setting, so I was more strict. I laid her job and her rapport with her workers on the line to be cut. I gave her a short time so that there would still be time to accomplish something.
>
> I wanted to let him know he had been hired to do a job and was expected to do so. The goal was to inform _____ of his responsibility. _____ is in a professional environment and should act in a professional manner.
>
> The goal was to let _____ know she can't keep slacking off at work and think others can help her catch up. She did it to herself.
>
> I used this approach because it's a job and people should be able to keep up even if they're out of work. My goal was to let him know that he should learn to keep up. People will fire you for being behind in your work.

These responses are consistent with Jablin (1987) and Richmond and McCroskey's (1992) observation that business settings as being characterized by a reliance on role prescriptions, rules, procedures, policies, and guidelines.

Additionally, the rationales for the messages in response to the comforting scenario described in the business setting had two distinguishing features. First, the rationales demonstrated that some participants held expectations about the extent to which involvement in personal problems that occur in a business setting is appropriate. The rationales indicated that some participants felt that as an employee their chances of experiencing some form of political backlash (e.g., their own job may be jeopardized) as a result of their involvement in such a matter were great. Examples of rationales that demonstrate this point include the following:

> (You really should not discuss that sort of thing in the business world.) I wanted to get off the subject. It shouldn't be discussed. The goal was to avoid the subject.
>
> I do not know the circumstances, and I do not want to interfere with management's or the supervisor's decision on the matter. My goal would be to stay out of it.
>
> My reason for this is that I might already have some kind of connection to the problem, and I wouldn't want to get any deeper involved. My goal is to maintain an official relationship with my co-worker.
>
> I really didn't know what to say. The goal was to get out of the fire before I had to listen to him make up excuses and possibly drag me into it.
>
> I really don't want to takes sides here. I've got to protect my own interest. The goal was to be comforting, but not tell them they are a great worker or criticize the management.

These responses are consistent with research that suggests that work environments regulate the display of emotions (Waldron & Krone, 1991).

Second, the rationales for the comforting scenario described in the business setting were characterized by an emphasis on objectivity. Examples of rationales that demonstrate this point include the following:

> I used this approach to tell _____ that in order for him to survive in that position, he must do what's expected of him. The goal was to help him solve the problem.
>
> The reason _____ got this was because of her performance. The goal was to get her to see her work performance was evaluated justly.
>
> To let her see no one gives her a poor evaluation unless she earned it. The goal was to show her that everything you get out of life is what you put into it.
>
> I wanted to show _____ that even though he thought he did his job correctly, Mr. Boss has to think so too. The goal was to make ____ evaluate his own performance.

> Many people understand better when the roles are switched. My goal was to make her feel like her boss so she could see what improvements she should make.

The emphasis on role prescriptions inherent in these rationales is consistent with an observation offered by Williams, Sjoberg, and Sjoberg (1983). They suggest that large, complex work organizations (which they refer to as bureaucracies) can shape behavior in such a way that "on the psychological level, the role replaces the person; [and] on the linguistic level, command replaces dialogue . . ." (p. 174). The scenarios gave no explicit attention to the specifics of the business setting in which the scenarios were described or the circumstances surrounding the events that were supposed to have taken place. Nevertheless, the responses suggest that the organizational context in which the scenarios were described affected participants' psychological functioning to the extent that they adopted what Williams et al. (1983) have referred to as the "bureaucratic personality" when responding to the scenarios described in the business setting. Similar to the behaviors attributed to the bureaucratic personality, the rationales in response to the scenarios described in the business setting are characterized by an emphasis on role conformity, efficiency, impersonality, and rationality.

Interviews

The interviews focused on five general concerns. First, did respondents notice the similarities and differences between the scenarios? Second, what were the differences in the perceived appropriateness of responses? Third, were communication styles relatively stable or situationally dependent? Fourth, were there differences in the perceived realism of the scenarios? Finally, did participants experience any difficulty formulating responses to the scenarios? The interviews were conducted because it was possible that a

pattern of consistent findings associated with either group could bias the results of the study. What follows here is a general summary of the responses to the interview questions. (For a detailed summary of the interview results, see Banks, 1995.)

The interview data do not indicate that cultural differences in perceptions about the scenarios biased the results of the study. The responses to the interview questions did not reflect a culture-specific pattern. Instead, the data point to the role of numerous variables in choosing communication strategies appropriate for managing interaction. Participants reported that other factors such as personality characteristics, relational intimacy, liking, and attributions about the other's behavior would influence their responses.

The interview results indicate that respondents from both groups recognized similarities and differences between the scenarios. The respondents did not describe what they were asked to do as gain compliance, refuse a request, and comfort another, but they noticed parallels between the scenarios and they articulated those parallels in their own words. The respondents also noticed that some of the scenarios were described in an academic setting and some were described in a business setting.

Consistent with the results yielded by the analyses of the rationales, the interview results revealed that the perceived appropriateness of the responses revolved around three issues. Some participants stated it was important to consider the other's motives and needs in formulating responses to the scenarios (e.g., whether illness or other extenuating circumstances may have precluded the other's ability to complete his/her work or to attend class). Some participants stated that politeness was a major concern in formulating their responses (e.g., avoid offending or hurting the other's feelings). Other participants

stated the other's failure to conform to normative expectations justified their response as appropriate (e.g., failure to conform to expectations about attending class and coming to work).

A third finding is that nearly all participants cited similar situations in which their reactions would be different from their responses to the scenarios. For example, some participants reported that the other's reasons for not doing his or her work would influence their response (e.g., illness versus laziness). Some participants noted that the other's personality would influence their response (e.g., snobby versus friendly). Other participants stated that their relationship with the other person would influence their response (e.g., someone they liked versus disliked or a friend versus an acquaintance). Only one participant could not think of any similar situation in which he would react differently than he did in response to the scenarios.

In addition to the data that have already been provided, the following excerpts from the interview data illustrate this point further:

> **Participant #1**. . . last week there was a young lady who hadn't finished her project right before the project was due. We all went to her and said, 'you need to get it together'. . . . Instead of volunteering to help her with it, we just let her know she had to get it together or else. . . . This young lady hadn't been studying with us because she was in her dorm asleep. There was another young man in our group who had death in the family, so we helped him. We just went on and helped out a lot in his situation as opposed to the young lady. We made her go to the library herself and spend a lot of time doing the research.
>
> **Participant #2**: If I had been involved with this student before and repeatedly this student has had problems getting their work done, I would not have been polite. I would have been as mean as possible. I would have taken any measures I had to insure that the student did their work. I think I would have gone to the professor or whatever. . . .

Two female participants provided these comments. An African-American female offered the first statement and a European-American female offered the second. These participants were interviewed separately, but each suggests that other factors such as relational history can exert a powerful influence on behavior and mediate the influence of culture on communication (For more interview data, see Banks 1995).

The validity of the methodological approach that was employed in this study also was assessed during the interviews. According to Burleson (1984), "the validity of results obtained through the use of experimental situations is obviously dependent on subjects believing that these situations are real" (p. 68). Thus, in developing the stimulus material for this study, the primary objective was to construct scenarios that approximated reality as closely as possible. To assess whether this objective was met, the interview participants were asked to rate the realism of the scenarios using a seven point Likert-type scale, with one being very realistic and seven being very unrealistic. Some participants gave each scenario a rating of one. Ratings by other participants ranged from one to four. Each scenario received a rating of one from at least one participant. Reasons for the lower ratings included not having personally experienced what was described in the scenario and perceptions about how frequently what was described in a particular scenario occurs (e.g., perceptions about how frequently people in a business setting would miss work). The realism ratings appear in Table 1 and Table 2.[1]

---

[1]Since the number of students participating in the interviews was small (N = 20), significance levels are not reported.

Table 1

Perceived Realism for the Total Group

	M	SD
Compliance-Gaining		
Academic	1.10	.31
Business	1.80	1.11
Request Refusal		
Academic	1.35	.67
Business	2.00	1.08
Comforting		
Academic	1.20	.62
Business	1.40	.68

Table 2

Perceived Realism Based on Ethnicity

	African-Americans		European-Americans	
	M	SD	M	SD
Compliance-Gaining				
Academic	1.10	.32	1.10	.32
Work	1.80	.92	1.80	1.32
Request Refusal				
Academic	1.40	.70	1.30	.68
Work	2.20	1.03	1.80	1.14
Comforting				
Academic	1.00	.00	1.40	.84
Work	1.60	.84	1.20	.42

Finally, the interviews revealed some of the difficulties participants experienced in formulating responses to the scenarios as well as other reactions to the scenarios. Three participants reported they experienced some difficulty formulating responses to the refusal scenarios. Two reported they experienced difficulty responding to the scenarios described in the business setting. One participant stated that providing the reasons underlying his responses was difficult. Another participant reported that a lack of

information about the causes of the other's behavior made formulating some of the responses difficult. Two participants noted they felt they were repeating themselves when responding to the last three scenarios. While some of the participants experienced difficulty in formulating responses to the scenarios, several did not. Additionally, the participants who reported they experienced some difficulty in formulating their responses did not mention any one problem repeatedly.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the factors that influence communication. The data gathered during one-on-one interviews and the reasons underlying the messages participants provided in response to several scenarios served as the focal point for the analysis. Consistent with the first part of the study, this aspect of the study illustrated the need to consider a number of variables when developing communication theories and models in order to avoid oversimplifying the relationship between culture and communication. The rationales and the interview data revealed that numerous factors (e.g., organization context, task characteristics, and attributions about behavior) lead to similarities and differences in communication across cultures.

The findings of this study should encourage scholars to employ multiple methodological approaches when studying communication to achieve a better understanding of the communication process in general and the relationship between culture and communication in particular. The data discussed in this paper provided evidence that conclusions based on snapshots of behavior abstracted from the larger

context in which the behavior occurs can be misleading. Using multiple measures of behavior may minimize problems of this nature.

Future research should also explore how institutions and other social structures mediate the influence of culture on communication. It is possible that variations in the forms of communication deemed appropriate in a business setting will be observed across different types of work organizations. For example, some business settings may encourage the use of more position-centered forms of communication by emphasizing adherence to rules, regulations, and procedures to a greater extent than other business settings.

One cannot draw definitive conclusions based on one study, but the findings serve as a reminder that the issue of cultural influences on communication is one that deserves careful reflection. The study also demonstrates the importance of using multiple measures of behavior when studying communication (e.g., conducting in-depth interviews and asking respondents to provide the rationales underlying their behavior). Such an approach may facilitate our efforts to the communication process and the variables that influence how we communicate.

Appendix A

Scenarios

Read through this situation and imagine yourself in it.

You are in a class in which a group project is to count 25% of your course grade. Up to this point in the relationship, your interaction with the group members has been task related with the exception of small talk during group meetings. One member of the group, whose race and gender are the same as yours, has failed to be present for group meetings and produce his/her work. Two days before the project is to be presented, all of the group members except this one individual have done the work each was assigned. Without the work of this one individual, however, the project as a whole will suffer. No one has been appointed to direct the activities of the group, but you have decided someone has to ask the person to complete his/her work. You have decided that you will be that "someone." Assuming you are actually talking with the person at this moment, write out exactly what you would say to the other group member. If additional writing space is needed, you can use the back of this page.

Now that you have placed yourself in the situation, write the reason(s) you used this approach?

In one sentence, what was your goal in this situation?

Read through this situation and imagine yourself in it.

One of your classmates, whose race and gender are the same as yours, has really gotten behind in a math class the two of you are taking because he/she was absent from class for three class periods. Now your classmate is having difficulty grasping the concepts being taught in the class. You are doing well in the class. Your classmate is aware of your performance in the class. Up to this point in the relationship, your interaction with this classmate has been limited to small talk during the class period, but now your classmate has asked you to meet with him/her the first weekend next month to help him/her prepare for the second exam. You know you don't have any plans for that weekend, but you've decided you don't want to tutor him/her in math. Today is the day you must inform your classmate that you will not tutor him/her in math. Assuming you are actually talking with the person at this moment, write out exactly what you would say to your classmate to inform him/her that you will not tutor him/her in math. If additional writing space is needed, you can use the back of this page.

Now that you have placed yourself in the situation, write out the reasons you used this approach.

In one sentence, what was your goal in this situation?

Read through this situation and imagine yourself in it.

Your roommate, whose race and gender are the same as yours, enters your dormitory room and is obviously very upset. Up to this point in the relationship, the interaction between you and your roommate has been what would be considered small talk, but you decide to ask your roommate what is wrong. When you ask your roommate what is wrong, he/she says chemistry is his/her major and he/she received a poor grade on his/her chemistry exam which could affect his/her final grade in the class, scholarship eligibility, and future plans. Assuming you are actually talking with the person at this moment, write out exactly what you would say to your roommate after learning this information. If additional writing space is needed, you can use the back of this page.

Now that you have placed yourself in the situation, write out the reason(s) you used this approach.

In one sentence, what was your goal in this situation?

Read through this situation and imagine yourself in it.

You are employed as a member of an advertising team. Up to this point, your interaction with the other team members has been task related with the exception of small talk during team meetings. Your team was given the responsibility of preparing a presentation for a client. One team member, whose race and gender are the same as yours, has failed to be present for group meetings and produce his/her work. Two days before the project is to be presented to the client, all the team members except this one individual have done the work they were responsible for developing. However, the project as a whole will suffer without the work of this one individual. No one has been assigned the responsibility of being group leader, but you have decided someone has to ask the person to complete his/her work. You have decided that you will be that "someone." Assuming you are actually talking with the person at this moment, write out exactly what you would say to your co-worker. If additional writing space is needed, you can use the back of this page.

Now that you have placed yourself in the situation, write out the reason(s) you used this approach.

In one sentence, what was your goal in this situation?

Read through this situation and imagine yourself in it.

Your co-worker, whose race and gender are the same as yours, has really gotten behind with his/her work because he/she was absent from work three days. Up to this point in the relationship, your interaction with this co-worker has been limited to small talk during office hours, but now your co-worker has asked you to come into the office to help him/her catch up with his/her work the first weekend in next month. You know you don't have any plans for that weekend, but you've decided you don't want to work either. Today is the day you must inform your co-worker you will not help him/her get caught up. Assuming you are actually talking with the person at this moment, write out exactly what you would say to your co-worker. If additional writing space is needed, you can use the back of this page.

Now that you have placed yourself in the situation, write out the reason(s) you used this approach.

In one sentence, what was your goal in this situation?

Read through this situation and imagine yourself in it.

Your co-worker, whose race and gender are the same as yours, enters the office the two of you share and is obviously very upset. Up to this point in the relationship, your interaction with this co-worker has been work related and limited to small talk during office hours, but you decide to ask your co-worker what is wrong. When you ask your co-worker what is wrong, he/she informs you that he/she just received a poor performance evaluation. Assuming you are actually talking with the person at this moment, write out exactly what you would say to your co-worker after learning this information. If additional writing space is needed, you can use the back of this page.

Now that you have placed yourself in the situation, write out the reason(s) you used this approach.

In one sentence, what was your goal in this situation?

Appendix B

Coding Indices for the Rationales

Coding Index for Compliance-Gaining Rationales

1. The rationale is governed by role prescriptions.

I just felt that class is an individual thing but when the emphasis is put toward a group related activity, everyone should be considerate to everyone else and complete their work. The goal was to get ____ to do his part of the project.

___ needed a little threat not a friend. A job is a job and he's got to do his part. The goal was to get the work done.

2. The rationale is governed by a desire to adapt to the listener's feelings within the frame of accomplishing the compliance goal.

I approached her calmly and rationally to make my statement to avoid upsetting her. The goal was to give us a better chance of getting her to positively respond.

I wouldn't want to enrage _____. As a member of the group, his actions/feelings are very important. However, I can't let him ignore his duties, as that would be unfair to the other group members. The goal was to motivate _____ to complete his share of the assignment without offending him.

3. The rationale is governed primarily by a desire to adapt to the listener's needs, intentions, and motives.

Maybe _____ has had personal problems or some other reason she has not been able to complete her part. Everyone needs a little help now and then. The goal was to show _____ that if she would give some effort someone would help her out.

I wanted to make sure there wasn't a good reason ___ didn't get his work done. I wanted ___ to realize that he was valuable to our team. And finally, I wanted ___ to know his actions were noticed and not acceptable. The goal was to find out why ___ wasn't working and to get him to work.

Coding Index for Request Refusal Rationales

1. The rationale is governed by role prescriptions.

I wanted ____ to know that it was his effort that caused him to be behind and it is not my responsibility to tutor him. The goal was to make ____ a more responsible person.

I used this approach to show _____ she cannot slide through on someone else's merit. The goal was to show _____ she needs to rely on herself more.

2. The rationale is governed by a desire to adapt to the listener's feelings within the frame of refusing the request.

Even though I lied, I was giving an account of why I couldn't tutor him. I was trying to be nice and not look like an ass. The goal was to get out of tutoring him without hurting his feelings.

I didn't want to lie, but I didn't want to discourage him either. So instead of lying, I only bent the truth a little by hinting I had something to do.

3. The rationale is governed primarily by a desire to adapt to the listener's needs, intentions, and motives.

I wanted to give her other options. I wanted her to know that it wasn't my responsibility. My goals were to let her know that I would not help her, but to also let her know of something else she could do to help herself.

It is obvious she needs some help and considering this is her job I would be more willing to help. More than likely there were good reasons for her absences. My goal here was to help her out in order to keep her job.

Coding Index for Comforting Rationales

1. The rationale is governed by organizational constraints and other role prescriptions.

I used this approach to make _____ aware of how partying can affect his studying. My goal was to make my roommate aware that studying comes first.

She might actually deserve a poor evaluation. If not, then she needs to question it. The goal is to help her act on the problem instead of dwelling on it.

2. The rationale is governed by a desire to improve the listener's distressed emotional state by diverting his or her attention away from the issue and the feelings present in the situation.

I used this approach to add a little humor to this tense situation. Hopefully, it would put a little smile on his face and not get him thinking of it too much. The goal was to relieve some stress that ____ had.

Because I want ____ to feel better about the situation and to try to help him get his mind off of it. The goal was to help ____ feel better and to help him get his mind off his problem.

3. The rationale is governed primarily by a desire to improve the listener's distressed emotional state by providing a positive outlook on the situation adapted to his or her feelings and needs.

I wanted to be as encouraging as possible and highlight the good aspects. The goal was to try to soften the blow of the test and make him feel better.

I didn't want this one performance evaluation to completely mess her up. She needs to be convinced that she is not a bad person. My goal was to make her feel better and get on with her life.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. Did you notice any similarities between the scenarios? If so, what are the similarities?

2. Did you notice any differences between the scenarios? If so, what are the differences?

3. Why do you feel the approach you used in response to each scenario was the most appropriate?

4. Can you think of similar situations in which you would use a different approach? If so, give an example of such a situation.

5. If you were to rate the realness of each scenario on a scale of one to seven, 1 = very realistic and 7 = very unrealistic, what rating would you give this scenario? Why would you give this rating?

6. Have you ever personally experienced a situation similar to what is described in either scenario? If so, which role were you in (e.g., the comforter vs. person being comforted)? How did you respond to that situation?

7. Was your behavior similar to the responses you provided?

8. Was there anything about the scenarios that made formulating the responses difficult? If so, what were the problems?

9. Did you have any other reactions to the scenarios?

References

Applegate, J. L. (1978). Four investigations of the relationship between social cognitive development and person-centered regulative and interpersonal communication. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana.

Applegate, J. L., & Delia, J. G. (1980). Person-centered speech, psychological development, and the contexts of language usage. In R. St. Clair & H. Giles (Eds.), The social and psychological contexts of language (pp. 245-282). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Applegate, J. L., & Sypher, H. E. (1988). A constructivist theory of communication and culture. In Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.), Theories in intercultural communication, (pp. 41-65). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Banks, T. V. (2000). Contextual influences on interpersonal communication: A comparative analysis. Encore: Journal of the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts, 40, pp. 79-95.

Banks, T. V. (1995). Contextual influences on perceptions of interpersonal communication: A comparative analysis. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky.

Butters, R. R. (1989). The death of Black English: Divergence and convergence in Black and White vernaculars. New York, NY: Verlag Peter Lang.

Cheek, J. M. (1976). Assertive Black . . . puzzled White. San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact Publications.

Collier, M. J. (1991). Conflict competence within African, Mexican and Anglo American friendships. In S. Ting-Toomey & F. Korzenny (Eds.), Cross-cultural interpersonal communication (pp. 132-154). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Delia, J. G., O'Keefe, B. J., & O'Keefe, D. J. (1982). The constructivist approach to communication. In F. E. X. Dance (Ed.), Human communication theory: Comparative essays (pp. 147-191). New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Garner, T. E. (1994). Oral rhetorical practice in African American culture. In A. Gonzalez, M. Houston, & V. Chen (Eds.), Our voices: Essays in culture, ethnicity, and communication (pp. 81-90). Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company.

Garner, T. E., & Rubin, D. L. (1986). Middle class Blacks' perceptions of dialect and style shifting: The case of southern attorneys. Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 5, 33-48.

Gumperz, J. J., & Cook-Gumperz, J. (1981). Ethnic differences in communication style. In C. A. Ferguson & S. B. Heath (Eds.), Language in the USA (pp. 430-445). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. Communication, 54, 454-472.

Jablin, F. M. (1987). Formal organization structure. In F. M. Jablin, L. L. Putnam, & K. H. Roberts (Eds.), Handbook of organizational communication: An interdisciplinary perspective (pp. 389-419). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Knapp, M. L., & Vangelisti, A. L. (1992). Interpersonal communication and human relationships. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (1992). Organizational communication for survival. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Shuter, R. (1982). Initial interactions of American Blacks and Whites in interracial and intraracial dyads. Journal of Social Psychology, 117, 45-52.

Vaughn-Cook, F. B. (1987). Are Black and White vernaculars diverging? American Speech, 62, 12-32.

Waldron, V. R., & Krone, K. J. (1991). The experience and expression of emotion in the workplace: A study of a corrections organization. Management Communication Quarterly, 4, 287-309.

Williams, N., Sjoberg, G., & Sjoberg, A. F. (1983). The bureaucratic personality: A second look. In W. B. Littrell, G. Sjoberg, & L. A. Zurcher (Eds.), Bureaucracy as a social problem (pp. 173-189). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, Inc.

Wolfram, W. (1981). Varieties of American English. In C. A. Ferguson & S. B. Heath (Eds.), Language in the USA (pp. 44-68). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.